

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: John E. Sharp

John E. Sharp, son of Charlie Robert Sharp and Lizzie Jones Sharp, was born in Dyersburg, Tennessee on November 10, 1938 and grew up in Flint, Michigan.

A graduate of Michigan State University and a former player for the Detroit Lions professional football team, Sharp first lived in Hawai'i in the early 1960s. Drafted into the U.S. Army, he was stationed at Schofield Barracks in Wahiawā, O'ahu. After two years in the islands, he returned to Michigan.

In 1966, he was employed as an outreach youth worker by the Kalihi YMCA. A year later, Pālama Settlement hired Sharp, where he was a youth worker/coach for the Pākōlea Program. He lived on the Pālama Settlement campus for nine years.

Since 1983 Sharp has been with the Hawai'i Job Corps.

He resides on O'ahu's North Shore.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

John E. Sharp (JS)

Waimānalo, O'ahu

December 2, 1997

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with John Sharp for the Pālama Settlement oral history project on December 2, 1997, and we're at his office in Waimānalo, O'ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, John let's start. Why don't we start by having you tell me, first of all, when and where you were born.

JS: Well, I was born in a little town called Dyersburg, Tennessee, which is about seventy-some miles from Memphis, but that's where I grew up, that's where I went to elementary school and I (lived) in that area. And from there, my family moved to Flint, Michigan Flint is where I (went) to junior high school and high school and where I graduated from high school—in Flint Northern High School.

WN: Why did you move from Dyersburg to Flint?

JS: Well, that was part of, the movement that General Motors and Ford made during that time, they needed workers in the northern states. So, my father was one of the guys who came by Greyhound to Flint to work for General Motors. They gave him housing and everything until they got their first few checks. My mom bought a home. And he [father] worked there for about thirty years.

WN: Do you know what he was doing in Tennessee?

JS: In Tennessee, in the [19]40s, he worked at a cotton gin, baling cotton, this was my father's job and it wasn't paying that much money at that time. So, they had to make a move and the big money was being made in the factories, especially with people that didn't really have an education.

My mom picked cotton. My grandfather had twenty-five acres of land that I lived on in Dyersburg, so I grew up on twenty-five acres.

We didn't have a whole bunch of money, but we had food because he grew his own food. We had land to play on and there were grapes and strawberries and blackberries and pecans and black walnuts and all of these things, natural springs, all this stuff, I grew up with. And a lot

of people don't realize because I lived in the South, that I had a real good life in the South up until my grandfather's [home burned down].

We had an eighteen-room home. We were at church and we saw this fire about a mile and a half from church and my grandmother said, "Gee, that's our home." And when we got there, it had burned completely to the ground. We lost everything. So, that made a major change in my life because, I was growing up with my mom and her father on the farm.

So, that broke up the family and that's how my mom had to make her move with her husband to the North and the other aunties and uncles and brothers went other different ways. So, I think that was a big major move for me when I was growing up.

WN: How old were you?

JS: I was like nine, ten, eleven, in that area, but I can remember all this stuff so clearly. And then I look back at it and see the experiences I had living down South. To the point of what I am doing today, with young people, who kind of like, didn't have things like I didn't have things, but I made it. You see, Mom didn't have an education but she was smart, super smart, you know. And these kind of things that I see in a lot of these kinds of kids, that was at Pālama and here [i.e., Hawai'i Job Corps], that have strong parents, but didn't have the education. And a lot of times, it's not the parents' fault, but it's just that they don't have it and then you've got the housings, like Mayor Wright [Homes] and all these other things that come in play with that.

WN: Back up a little bit. So, you moved to Flint when you were about nine or ten?

JS: Mm hmm.

WN: Can you compare Flint with Dyersburg?

JS: Well, Flint, let me say it this way, Flint and Dyersburg were similar and let me tell you why it was similar. Because at the time that we made the move North, [many] Blacks made the move North. Whites also made the move North. Because they were looking for the bigger money, they were also working cotton fields and things, but a lot of them owned them, but then there were White people that were poor that was growing up like I was. So, they made the move.

So, they didn't just take Black people to Flint, Michigan, they took Black and White. So, you end up with southern Whites and southern Blacks living in a northern city like Flint. They even had the Klan in Flint that would march through the streets and stuff. So, you still had the same---the only thing that I saw the difference was, the education.

Like down South, I went to an all-Black school, everything that I did was all Black. So, when I got to Michigan, it was a mixed school that I had the same chance to get the same education that everybody else was getting and that was a major change. In Flint, they only had two high schools at that time. So, all the little Blacks in Flint at that time I knew because there was only the two high schools. But now there's ten high schools and there's hundreds of thousands more Blacks living in Flint than when I was, I don't know anybody now. You know, you go back and you look at places where I grew up is all gang infested and stuff. So, it's nothing like when I was growing up in Flint.

WN: So, when you were growing up in Flint, was your neighborhood integrated?

JS: Uh, yeah. My neighborhood in Flint was integrated, yes, because I think one of the teachers stayed, a Haole teacher stayed a couple houses from where we lived. So, it was and the school was, but you still had the racial problems there in Flint and as you did in other places where there were Black and White at that time 'cause this was the late [19]50s and things were heavy, there were no Civil Rights at that time. This was when things was beginning to happen for Civil Rights movements. In the South, I had to drink [water] in the area where there was for Blacks only, Black toilets, Black theaters, everything was Black. So, then that was a major change when I came to Flint. Now when I left Flint and came to Hawai'i, that was another major change.

(Laughter)

JS: 'Cause it was totally different here than it was in Flint. I had already met friends and made friends and everything here because of the military. And at Schofield [Barracks], when I was at Schofield, all I did was play sports. So, I lived in Waikiki with my wife and went to Schofield in the mornings to work and all I did was practice football and wrestle and ran track. That kind of kept me out of Vietnam, though.

(Laughter)

JS: 'Cause I wasn't trained. That was one of the reasons why I didn't go, but that was . . .

WN: So, '63 when you first came?

JS: Well, this was '63 that I came (to Hawai'i) I went for a year and came back.

WN: Okay. Well, then, let's just back up just a little bit. Tell me a little more about your education in Flint and what led you eventually to go to Michigan State University.

JS: Oh, well, in Flint, I didn't really realize the type of athlete that I was. I really had no idea because I had never played sports before. (But my friend) knew that I was fast because he had watched me run in the streets there. So, he wanted to put me up against the fastest guys in the school at the time. And they got all the guys who were fast, one was a 100-yard dash champ. This was ninth grade, they put the best out there and they bet quarters, and this guy bet everything on me. I beat the fastest guy out there by about three to four yards. So, that kind of got me in going out for sports.

And then I never played football before. I got a shot because the guy that was playing the position, he couldn't---he made ten yards out of the whole half. So, they put me in for him. The guy said, "What do you play, man?"

I said, "I'm a halfback."

He said, "Get in at halfback."

The first time I touched the ball, I went for fifty yards. Touchdown. Next time I touched the ball, I went for another forty-some-yard touchdown. So, that kind of like started me playing

football and because of the other incident with the running, I started running track and so I became the best in the state of Michigan. I was an all-star, all-American in high school in football. I was a four-forty [440 yard], quarter-miler champ. I held the record for three years and I was state champion for the three years. I also was on the wrestling team and wrestled in the state wrestling [tournament]. I took sixth in the wrestling.

But I had a chance to get scholarships because I was a good athlete. And I had offers to University of Iowa, I visited out there, I visited University of Nebraska. I didn't go to Nebraska for one reason. Because at this time I would have been the first Black to play in their backfield. And in Lincoln, Nebraska, I looked around and there weren't nobody but Haoles. And I just couldn't deal with it at that time. I wish I would have gone to Nebraska because it would have been great to be the first Black in history [there]. I ended up being recruited by the University of Michigan which my grades weren't A's and you had to have a pretty close to a three point [grade average] at the University of Michigan. So, I was able to get in with my grade level at Michigan State because I wanted to go to one of those schools. I ended up going to Michigan State and playing there for three years. And then in my last year, Herb Adderley was put at the same position. So, Herb Adderley was running in front of me while I was in my last year at Michigan State. They switched me and Herb to the same [position] back and then Gary Balman was at the other halfback and then George Saimes was the fullback. Yeah, so this was the team that I played with. And it was just a trip for me to get a chance to go from high school, go from the cotton fields, with all this to go up through finding out that you're the fastest guy in the whole state of Michigan, you're the best halfback in the state of Michigan, you're all-American and all these things.

So, two years ago, I got this note because they have what they call the Afro-American Hall of Fame in the state of Michigan. So the guys called and said that I had been accepted into the Afro-American Hall of Fame. So, I left Hawai'i, flew back to Michigan and I was inducted into the Afro-American Hall of Fame in football and track. I just got that two years ago. So, if you ever go to Flint, Michigan, you go to the Hall of Fame, you'll see my picture there and that whole works. That was a thrill for me because when I went back there, there were 700 people at the banquet, at least 700. They inducted me plus four other guys. And boy, what a thrill because they put us through some really good positive feelings with the whole crowd. I had my family there, my mom's family, and my dad's family, and what a thrill, man.

WN: You remember it, huh?

JS: Oh, yeah, this is great. Then I started working here, once I got through here, as far as the military. Now, I went back and this was during the time they had all the riots in Michigan. And I had been living here in Hawai'i in '63 and '64 and said gee, now why should I come back here to all of this rioting and stuff? And when I was in Hawai'i on the beaches and stuff and having a good time. And people here were so nice that the first day I came back to Hawai'i, my wife and I, we were just trying to move in, so the neighbors say, "Hey, come have dinner with us." It was just like that the whole week or so that I was moving into my place here in Hawai'i. So, it was time to come back to Hawai'i and make my home and that's what I did.

WN: So, you went back to Flint while you were still in the [U.S.] army?

JS: No, I was out.

WN: Oh, you were out?

JS: I was out.

WN: Okay. You had served your time.

JS: I had served my time. I was with the 25th [Infantry] Division. When they moved the 25th [Infantry] Division to Vietnam, anybody that had four months or less stayed back. I had four months. Oh, I was blessed. I had four months. I stayed back along with the other guys and we shipped stuff to Vietnam. We were the ones who packed up and were shipping stuff from Pearl Harbor and all these other places and that's all I did for the time till I got out. The 25th [Infantry] Division was getting wiped out and these were all people that I knew.

My wrestling coach was shot down in his helicopter and killed the second week there. Sergeant Poole, one of my offensive guards—and I couldn't believe that this was really happening. That people that I knew was being killed like that and I was saved for some reason that I didn't go because of four months. And I didn't really have the training like I said because I played—that's all I did at Schofield was playing sports. But still, there were other guys who had a year that played sports that went. I just was short—four months.

So, when I decided to come back here and live, I didn't really have a job. But we had saved just enough money to just kind of vacation for a little bit, you know. And have a little money in the bank for rent and all that stuff. But, then we finally went to work. And then I started working at Campbell Industrial Park at the refinery, working in one of the labs out there. This was because Dr. [Martin Luther] King had been assassinated, and Standard Oil had never had a Black person working for their refinery here in the state of Hawai'i. So, one guy that was going to a church that I attended had met me, knew that I was from Michigan State, knew that I was a college grad and he says, "Man, take the test because I think you can pass the test." They hired me and I was like the first Black hired by the Standard Oil Refinery. And it was a great job, but it was swing shift.

WN: What was your job?

JS: I worked in testing the crude after they put it through the different chemicals and stuff and then you would test by the levels of certain bubbles that they had in the computer room. And this is how you would know if everything was at the right mixture into the gasoline. And that's the kind of stuff I did out there. But it was a good job, it paid, but it was swing shift and me, living in the Waikiki area and driving out there every day to Campbell Industrial Park in the traffic all through Pearl City and that area 'cause there was no freeways, it was just driving me nuts. So I just gave the job up, I quit that job. 'Cause that wasn't my field, my field was recreation, so I ended up applying for a job at Kalihi YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association].

WN: Your degree in college was in recreation?

JS: Recreation, yeah.

WN: Kalihi Y.

JS: Kalihi Y, yeah. So, they had a job opening in my field. And this was counseling and working with street gangs and working in and out of the housing areas with different kinds of programs they were setting up in Kūhiō Park Terrace, Kalihi Valley Housing, and Lanakila. All those housing areas was all involved. At that time the YMCA was involved with different kinds of programs for all of these areas and I didn't really know that. But anyway, that's how I got my first job working with street gangs and working with just the hard-core kids. They put me with the hard-core. But I fit in with 'em because they accepted me. It was kind of hard when I was at Mayor Wright's and Pālama [Settlement]. But they accepted me out [Kūhiō Park] Terrace and Kalihi Valley and those places as an athlete, a super-athlete that they wanted to be like and they didn't mind playing football for me. This is even before I came to Pālama.

And this was the kind of stuff I was doing when I was at a conference at the University of Hawai'i. And I met Earlene [Piko] and Ken [Kenneth] Ling from Pālama Settlement. I had never really ever heard of Pālama Settlement. So Earlene said, "You know, after listening to you talk today, you'd be perfect for what we want to do at Pālama."

And I said, "Explain it to me."

And so this is when she said, "We want to start a program called Pākōlea." And she explained in detail what they were going to do as far as setting up the program.

They needed someone that the students could really be turned on to and the type of thing that we were getting ready to do. We were getting ready to make these kids study before they play football. So, if they will accept the academic part of our program then they will accept the sporting too. So, if you accept the athletics, you accept the academic. So, it worked both ways. And this was kind of what we set it up to be. We set it up where, that we were going to force these kids to study. If they really wanted to play football and they really wanted to play basketball, then they would study.

So, this is how the Pākōlea was set up. It was set up where that behavior mod [modification]. You know, you set it up in advance, you form their behavior before they get out here in the streets and start doing crazy stuff. And Earlene Piko and Ken Ling was the program directors and I came in as a street worker at that time (laughs) which I was called, but I was also doing counseling in the housing and also coaching the football team for the Pākōlea. And this is how I started. That's really why they hired me at Pālama, to coach that team.

Because Pālama had a bad name as far as the kids from that area. You know, this is where all the hoods are, this is where Mayor Wright housing, you know, you got all the hoods. Football games, people be scared to go because the Pālama parents would be fighting if they lost. So you'd be looking for a fight if Pālama lost. But what was happening is that they were allowing these guys to bring booze and drink on the field and stuff. And there was not a lot of pride that I found in what the kids were doing at Pālama and what was happening with the parents. And this is something that I saw when I first realized when they talk about all the fights that they were having and riots and stuff. And this kind of scared me my first year at Pālama because I didn't know the kids. I had worked with the group out of Kūhiō Park Terrace, that area, but I hadn't met any of the kids in the Mayor Wright area, so this is where probably 80 percent of the students were coming from that was in that program there, that and Lanakila.

So, I had to make friends. I had to make friends with the parents first. One of the things that

Earlene did, we called all of the parents together from all the areas that had kids that was going to participate in the Pākōlea Program. And parents came in and they met me. I explained to them what I wanted to do with that team and with the kids. I wanted to have a first-rate football team. I want to have students who are going to go on and graduate and go high school and go college. And I was just telling the parents all of these things that I wanted to mold all these young brothers into being. All I needed was their help and that is what I got. From the time that I started coaching Pālama, and I coached for fifteen years, from the day that I started to the day that I stopped coaching, I had the support of the community, the parents, the city, the state, everybody, you know why? Because we were winners. My first year, I lost one game.

The first year I tied one with Pālolo. But after that, I won eleven championships, we won eleven championships. The first ten seasons, I lost two games, in ten years with these guys.

The first season, we went undefeated and the second season, we went undefeated. We'd have seventy-some kids turn up. The parents wanted their kids in the program because we didn't only have study hall, we had a training table, we fed 'em. (Laughs) Right out of Mayor Wright's they're eating on a training table, you know. So, this was something that turned the parents on because they could come to Pālama, get one good meal, and do their studies. Usually we took English and math and they did those two things, played football, took a shower, had your training table, you ate your food, you did your study hall and then you went home.

And not just study what we gave 'em, but if they were doing bad in classes up at Farrington and some of these other schools, then we worked on the classes they were doing bad in. You know, we had tutors coming from the University of Hawai'i and that's where most of our tutors came from at that time. Teachers helped out, business people were coming down. I mean, you know, we were winning so everybody wanted to be part of what was happening at Pālama at that time with the young people. Because we started getting guys going to St. Louis [School]. They started recruiting from Pālama. They were recruiting my players to go St. Louis and play. There were guys who went on from these teams that played at UH. And, you know, it's like these are the guys that came from the housing. Like the Ma'afalas coming from Pālama. You know, there was Kealoha that played for UH, Eddie. Jason who played at Kam[ehameha]. And see, some of these guys were making names for Pālama Settlement, [such as] Fituina Tua who played at St. Louis [School] is now [U.S. probation officer]. He's the first Samoan. These are the kind of guys---and then lot of these guys would come back, you know. These guys would come back to Pālama and help out. Nogas, the Noga brothers.

We had a good program and the parents knew we had a good program, so they wanted their kids in the program. We had to cut down to thirty-five players. Every year I had to cut down to thirty-five players. They had other football teams in the Kalihi area, 'cause Kalākaua had one and Upper Kalihi had one, but all the kids come play for me. They broke it down into districts in the Kalihi area. I could only pull from certain areas after I was taking everybody. I had guys coming from Pearl City to play for me. I had guys coming from Waimānalo to play for me. I mean, parents who wanted them on the team and I was pulling the best and nobody knew how I was winning every year.

Every year I would win a championship, we go take the kids to Disneyland. We went out to play a team out in New Mexico on an Indian reservation and lived for a week on the Zuni

reservation. The shocking thing about the Zunis was that the kids from Pālama, when they got off the bus and they looked at the Zuni Indians, they looked just like them. (Laughs) It freaked 'em out. Whoa! You know, way out here in the middle of nowhere in the winter time, we're cold and they see all these guys that look just like them.

We went to Denver. We went places where it was exciting and new. We went down South, we played in North Carolina. I took a team down there and we played an all-Black team and we beat 'em. The second half, we beat 'em. The first half, they were beating us and I talked to my boys at half time. I said, "Boys, you representing Hawai'i." I said, "These boys are gonna call you a bunch of pineapples and all that." I ran it down. We came back out there and we won the game 23-20. And these guys in North Carolina said "Gee, I have never seen such kids that had so much heart and desire and the physical part that they did that night." And how it was just amazing to see people coming from---they always thinking Hawai'i was soft. But these guys were hard and tough and solid. And they showed respect to my team for that, too, and everybody came up and shook their hands. You know, so we gave them all of these different experiences.

I think the reason why we won all the time was because I was doing things that nobody knew how I was doing them with these kids. But it was all about pride. What I would do, like I had a form of meditation that I did with these kids. And it was a form of meditation where it was just a matter of learning that you could get a natural high without drugs. Just something natural and you can use your own energy and you can get so strong and so full of that energy you can beat anybody. You know, and this is what I put into their heads by doing this type of meditation with these kids.

For example, at Pālama, we had this big green truck, it's like a cattle truck and it would put fear into the hearts of other teams when we drove on the field. They said, "Oh, here comes Pālama and their cattle truck." And my boys would get off and we wouldn't say anything. We would go sit in the middle of the field in a circle. Now this is while the other team is down, you know how kids are. But my guys, they knew what I wanted because I had taught them this way. And so I'd sit 'em in a circle and they all would close their eyes and have their heads down and this exercise was like a breathing exercise. You breathe in, you hold it. You breathe in counting twenty, you hold it, count twenty and then you let it out, count twenty, and you do it reverse, you do it again. Do it again, just breathe normal. And this is what I was having these kids to do and just think about what your job is today and how good it would feel to win, you see. We know what the losing part of life was about, but let's see how good it feels to win. And if each man did his job at his position, I told these guys, nobody on the field can beat you. They never lost because they really believed. Now, when we lost the one game, which was about five years later, we lost one game in five years and—it was hard to deal with it myself because I had been winning for so long. It was the same way. I know what Cal Lee [St. Louis School head football coach] is going through winning because the pressure is there from everybody and when you lose, you lose.

And it was something where that, after all those years, we finally lost a game. And I think that the boys accepted it because I had to accept it first and get it in my head so I could deal with my boys. But we came back and we didn't lose anymore that year. But that same year, we went out to the stadium and won the championship. So, that's kind of like how I built that team into believing in themselves. And practice, man, when I practice with my teams what I would do is the first week or two of the season, I had just basic plays that I taught my kids:

dives, criss-cross and sweeps and that's all I taught 'em. While these other coaches out here [today] teaching all these different. . . . So, I taught just do these five plays and you do 'em well.

We beat everybody in the state of Hawai'i. Just do these five plays well. That's all we did. And then after I'd got them going that way, then I would add different formations. I could do anything then, once they learned the basics. And no team could do this in Pop Warner 'cause they couldn't defense what I would set up because of so many different formations. I'd go into a pro-set with Pop Warner. I was running double-wings and stuff that no other teams were doing and nobody could ever stop. . . .

The one game---the first half, Waimānalo was the team we played, they didn't reach their (forty). The whole first half. So, I put my fourth team in. So, it was just the confidence that these kids built at Pālāma during that time. And what I enjoy now is going back and see all these guys growing up. Some of them are with the police department. There's a young man right now, Higa. Higa is with the special squad and he has his dog trained to work with him. The SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics Team], yeah. So, he's with the SWAT team. And he was one of my ends. But I see these guys doing all kinds of things now. And it paid off to me to look back and see all these guys doing different things.

Like some guy brought in some vegetables down here with a truck at our cafeteria one day and I guess I hadn't seen the kid since he played football for me. He said, "Coach Sharp!"

And I said, "Who are you?"

And he told me his name and what year he played for me and everything. He's doing his thing and, man, you know, he's big in the company. I see all of these different guys and, man, it's just a thrill to see how these guys have grown up to be men.

WN: You're talking about the winning tradition of Pālāma. Was that tradition there before you got there? And if not, what was the difference?

JS: Well, the tradition of Pālāma, I guess, was always tough. You know, not so much as being the winner, I guess tough. Because, say if they went to Waimānalo and played, they didn't win the football game, they wanted to fight though. You know, if you come from Pālāma Settlement, you had to be tough. And I don't know what the attitude of winning was because when I got there they had had a few losing seasons and it was so disorganized 'cause people were fighting amongst themselves.

But Pālāma tradition was to build pride. That's what it came for me at Pālāma. That's what we all talked about at Pālāma is to build pride. In being who you are, whether you from Mayor Wright [Homes] or whether you from Diamond Head, you build pride into who you are. Pālāma Settlement is all about building pride, being the best you can be whether you're from wherever. You be the best you can be. And for my sixteen years at Pālāma, this is what we tried to give to the students. To be the best you can be. Have pride in yourself, have pride in your family, have pride in Pālāma.

Because Pālāma became like a family to everybody that was involved with Pālāma. If you were involved in Pālāma, you were like Pālāma family. When we had cookouts and carnivals,

man, you don't get things going unless you have parents. We had tons of parents. People couldn't believe how parents would turn out for our activities. We had a carnival. We raised \$25,000 in two nights. We cleared \$25,000 in two nights, thanks to parents that worked their butts off, man. And we'd have *hulihuli* chicken sales, we'd do whatever. It was the parents that turned out. If we had a meeting and we would have thirty-five to forty students, we had somewhere between twenty-five, thirty parents. And that's hard to believe, man. Our meetings we would have just about 95 percent parent participation and that's what made Pālama strong.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: How do you instill pride? I mean what is the pride there? What was your job when you took over?

JS: When I took over, the pride of Pālama Settlement was there because, like you could look at the attitude of the kids coming in there playing for Pālama Settlement. You know, you play for Pālama Settlement, it was like you had to have a certain amount of pride about the place because Pālama was always known as a sporting area, and facilities. You know, no matter what other things they were doing at Pālama, they had sports facilities.

I looked at the barefoot league football team that they had back there twenty-something years from then. That was back in the [19]20s, I guess, and they had trophies there with the barefoot (football) team, baseball, at Pālama Settlement. That freeway took out the whole field where they used to have all the sports, but Pālama was known as a sporting center of Kalihi. This is what I knew of Pālama and that, good athletes, great athletes had been through there. You had doctors and lawyers and all these people had been through Pālama Settlement. So, this is how it was given to me when I came in.

So, we started out with that Pālama pride. Everybody that worked with my staff and during the time that I was there, it was all about Pālama pride. And you instill that into the kids and they had pride in their team and their studies and taking care of the facilities there at Pālama. You know just to say, "Eh, who you play football for?"

"I play for Pālama Settlement." Oh, man. What kind of pride that kids would have about just being from Pālama was unbelievable. That's why right now there are kids and young people today that will never forget Pālama. They always say the same thing I say. Pālama is part of my heart, it will never leave because that was during my prime time of my life.

(Laughter)

JS: I was in my prime. And I was just enjoying my life here at Pālama. I lived on campus. I lived there at the settlement and I lived there for nine years and. . . .

WN: What was it like?

JS: Oh, it was great. Now, there were times that guys knew me that I had to make clear

sometimes that my purpose at Pālama was not to hide out the crooks, but it was there to help them, to help their families, to help the kids see how important sports and education was. That's my purpose at Pālama.

I had a guy knock on my door, I go down and some guy says, "Brother Sharp, can I hide these watches here?"

I say, "Man. . . ." (Laughs) A box of shirts he had ripped off at [J.C.] Penney or somewhere. I say, "Guys, that's not my purpose here at Pālama. You know, you never bring any stolen goods or any of this stuff to my apartment because that's not what the set is. If they find that in my place, not only you, but I will be going to jail." So, I had that kind of thing happening a lot. The guys would come by, they want to hide out for a minute. And people don't know a lot of stuff was going on with the young people in that area doing the [19]60s and [19]70s. I mean, lot of gangs, but the gangs at that time was different from the gangs today. The gangs back then were more adult gangs, older people. You see, like now, you got a guy out there fourteen years old, fifteen. I mean, they ain't through junior high school, they in gangs. But the gangs back then, the average age was like eighteen, nineteen. These were guys who had dropped out of high school. These were some of the Kealohas and Huihuis and those guys back in those days. These guys were big time, big time. You know, these were bad guys from Mayor Wright housing. So, it was different in how you dealt with guys then and the way you deal with them now, you know. But, ah, . . .

WN: Pakōlea Program, okay. What were the aims of it? It seems as though they had this winning tradition, they had this reputation in the community for athletic excellence. What did they want to do by putting in this program?

JS: Well, the first thing that they wanted to do—and this is how we had our first meeting—we want to show these kids in this area that you just don't play sports and get an education. It's not all about just playing sports and getting an education, but there's a balance. Pālama Settlement is going to show you the balance to be a student or to be a young person that can go into his community and work and have a decent job. Pālama Settlement is going to show you how to do that.

So, when we first came in, our job was to show the young people in that area that you not just not going to play sports anymore. "All this time, you guys just been playing sports here in Pālama. You didn't have to go study, you didn't have to do this, you just come Pālama and play football. So, we're going to make some changes here. The change is that we're going to give you a balance. We're going to show you young people that over the next twenty years that if you do what we say here, that you gonna look back at Pālama and say, 'Thank you, Pālama'" And that's what a lot of them did.

WN: Did you lose kids because of that?

JS: Not that many because, see, that's the thing that they say would never work. They said, "That program will never work. You're not gonna make these kids coming from Mayor Wright's and Lanakila and all these places and make 'em study. They don't study at home, how you guys here at Pālama going to make 'em study?"

The whole deal was---and we went through this, this went on for weeks setting up this

program. We had to set certain rules and things. Certain rules that kids can't break, as far as studies. Miss so many and you were out. There had to be certain rules, but at the same time, you going to bring kids in there. And what we had to do, first of all, every kid had to have a test, a test level to see what grade level, whether they were tenth-graders, ninth-graders, what grade level we would work with them.

So they took the test and they tested out and he's a ninth grader. He tested out of eighth grade, we work from eighth grade up, you see. So, the idea was to give them sports, but at the same time, you earn it. You earn your way on that football field, you earn your way on that basketball court. You earn it. Now, how you going to earn playing football? You earn it by doing academics. How're we going to tell? You must have 95, 90 to 100 percent on your test scores for that day before you come out for practice. Every kid that came out for practice brought a slip from his tutor saying that he had his 90 or 100 percent. People didn't think it was going to work. It worked perfect.

The first time that we did it, the first year we only had two or three kids that didn't make it, everybody else made it. The next year, 100 percent. Hundred percent of the students went through our academic program using athletics as a reward. So, athletics became a reward for---you know, you study, your reward is to play sports. So, you go into college knowing that if you going to play football for UH, you gotta be a student first.

So, what we did is that we made them earn their points before they came out to play football the next day. So, how they earned their points was to do their work before they went home. So, we gave 'em two hours. After football practice, you got two hours to go up and do your work. We got tutors, we got teachers, everybody there to help you do your work. They do their work, they turn it into the instructor, he checks it out. If you don't have your 90 percent, you go back and you work until you get your 90 to go practice.

WN: Did you work with the teachers too at school?

JS: Oh yeah. I used to go up to Dole [Intermediate School] every other day. (Laughs) I mean, because of problems in the classroom and they oh. . . . With me, I was hitting all the schools. I'm at Likelike [School] one day, I'm up at Central [Intermediate School] the next day, I'm down at Kalākaua [Intermediate School], I'm over at Dole. That was part of my job, during football season during the day. Whenever I had boys in these schools, I checked on 'em. Whenever one of 'em got in trouble, I had the teacher, the vice principal to give me a call at my office there at Pālama and I would be there.

And this was where I kept all my boys straight, the whole time. I'd go to the school, I'd ease in on 'em and check 'em out sometime in the class. 'Cause like I get the word from the teacher that the kid is acting up in class, or didn't turn in his homework or whatever, he get to me the next day, he don't practice. "Brah, you didn't do your homework? Well, then you go upstairs at Pālama, you do your homework and when the instructor gives you the slip that you've completed your homework then you can come out for practice. Now, for coming out for practice late, you give me three or four laps around the field plus some sprints." For coming out late, I'm letting 'em practice. But he's late because that's his fault he didn't do his homework. We were tough on 'em, we were tough all those years, but it paid off man.

WN: How hard and fast were the rules that you had? For example what if your star quarterback for

the big game (chuckles) has a problem? If you had some kid break . . .

JS: Yeah, well. Yeah. (Laughs) Well, my quarterback---we were playing for the championship. We were planning to go to the stadium. We're going to play Waimānalo for the championship and I had this quarterback who was a paint sniffer. A good quarterback, played at Farrington, was a super quarterback at Farrington. He was always coming to practice---and when he first came down to be on the team, I could smell the paint.

I said, "Brah, you cannot play football here at Pālama, I know you sniffing that rag."

Okay, he said, "Coach, I'm gonna give it up. I'm not gonna sniff it anymore."

Okay fine. Now, he went for the whole year, probably all the way to that one game. And then he came practice one (Monday), we had a game that (Sunday). It was a practice on a (Monday), he came and smelled like paint. I mean, I knew he had been sniffing that paint.

And I said, "Man, you been sniffing the paint. We got a championship game coming up Sunday. I tell you what I want you to do. It's gonna hurt the team, I want you to understand that, but I want you to leave this field. I don't want you to suit up. I don't want you near the field. What you do, you go home or you go somewhere [away] from Pālama. As long as you sniffing that paint, I don't want you anywhere around us, whether you starting quarterback, whatever." So, I didn't start him. He didn't even come to the field because he followed through on that. And the thing that shocked him was, he thought we were going to go out there and lose without him and all that. Man, we won fifty-five to zip. (Laughs) We won fifty-five to zip.

But for the rest of that season, he never sniffed that rag again. But, he got back on the rag and started sniffing that paint all the way through high school and this kid died, what, two years ago at an early age 'cause he had a tumor in his brain from that paint. And it's just a lost case. Super kid, had a beautiful wife and a beautiful baby and he'd go to the baby crib smelling like paint. So, the father of this girl kicked him out of the house 'cause, you know, he didn't want the kid anywhere around his daughter or the baby sniffing the paint. He still couldn't give it up, until the day he died. And the day that he died, he was high. Just for some reason, this was one kid that just couldn't stop sniffing that paint and it finally killed him. At a young age, too.

WN: The kids that you had to discipline or turn away because of the rules regarding academics and so forth, did they end up going to other parks to play for them?

JS: Yeah, they ended up going to---a lot of them went to Kalihi to play, not so much that we dropped them because of the problems (telephone rings) but, excuse me just one minute.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Oh, yeah, I asked you the question about kids leaving to go to another program . . .

JS: Yeah, a lot of times we could only keep thirty-five students, kids here on the team. So, the other guys have to go and sign up with other teams. And other teams were not even being filled, like the Kalihi team, the Punchbowl team, some of these teams were short of kids

because they were all coming out at Pālama. And so when we couldn't put 'em on the team---and lot of times, the guys just, couldn't play football. Because your parents want you to play, don't mean you can play the game. And I'd just say, "Man, this kid is gonna get hurt." And lot of kids like that, I would not play, I would drop.

But now, in Pop Warner, it doesn't matter if you can play or not. You've got thirty-five guys on your team. The first thirty-five guys, thirty-five kids--that's your team. There's no competition. There's no picking out guys. There's no cutting kids anymore, that's your thirty-five guys. I would never coach Pop Warner again because it's a competitive kind of sport. And everybody is not football players and (laughs) that's for true. So, I would never do that.

WN: What made you leave Pālama Settlement?

JS: Well, the reason I left Pālama, financially, this was a better job.

WN: You went to Pālama to here?

JS: Yeah, right from Pālama.

WN: In 1983?

JS: [Nineteen] eighty-three I came. [Nineteen] eighty-three I left Pālama. And it was like the job offered here---you see, I had worked at Pālama. Earlene Piko at that time had been working here at [Hawai'i] Job Corps at the other center. And I was still at Pālama and she called and said, "John, you want to work for me?"

I said, "Work for you at Job Corps and running the recreation program there or something?"

And then she told me the salary and I said, "Let me think about it." And so I called her back and said, "Yeah, I think I'm gonna have to leave Pālama."

You know, it's always hard, it's hard to leave Pālama. I had been there so long and I was set. This was my life. And when I realized that I'd be making that much more at this job, you know, 'cause, you know we got paid from Aloha United [Way] funds and stuff like that. Down there [Pālama Settlement], you gotta raise the money. (Laughs) You gotta raise the money at Pālama. So, over here, you don't have to raise the money, it's a federal program. Like everything I have here, I have an allowance, a budget that they give me here, a year. And that means I can just about buy things, anything that I need for these students. I couldn't do that at Pālama.

WN: I've got a couple more questions. From the time you left in '83, go back to when you first started building the program and stuff, what changes took place? What was different about Pālama from the time you came right till the time you left? Good things and bad things.

JS: The things that was good, I think, when I was there at Pālama, it was a family. It was all about family. It was all about helping the kids. It was all about making sure that these kids get the best education and the best sports that they can get. This is the attitude at the time.

[Pālama Settlement] was going into these housing areas and setting up programs where you

didn't have to pay money for these things because we were going out raising the money ourselves. We go out and we have sales. We do this, we had donations and people would just—Duty Free [Shoppers], the vice president, I met him on a plane. I knew him. He told me, "I always wanted to meet you, John Sharp." And when I got back, he gave me \$10,000 cash to buy shoulder pads and equipment for Pālama Settlement's football team. Just like that!

So, we were going out and getting money and stuff. We hustled, man. But now, Pālama has changed. Somebody told me a couple weeks ago that each student coming from Mayor Wright's to play on that team, they had to pay \$200 per kid to play on the team. So, what's happening at Pālama now is that, it seems like they're more trying to survive and having outside teams and [organizations] come in and renting out the place. We didn't do that before. All that was just for the kids and for the community and everything.

You got teams at Pālama now playing from Kāne'ohe. All that stuff rented out now. And it wasn't like that before because people in Mayor Wright's didn't have to go out and pay no \$190, \$200 for equipment and stuff. That was all paid for by Pālama. And now you don't have a Pop Warner team there anymore. They've moved down to the military [bases] because it's cheaper.

So, the major changes now and I'm not saying that it's a negative change, but the major change now is that I think Pālama seems like it's more towards adult leagues and adult things than they are as young people, young people things, you know. 'Cause I go down there at night and if I go down Pālama, I pass by, they got some type of league going and usually it's adults, you know. So, I see a lot of that happening now, where I'm not saying that it's wrong, but I see where's more to the older adults now, whether they are from Pālama or wherever they are from. But it's open to the public and it's more adults. That's a big major change. And the amount of things that was free. Pālama was freedom. You come Pālama Settlement it's free at last! You see. And this is what Pālama is all about. But now, everything is pay. You see, you pay for these things now and I don't know why that changed at Pālama.

WN: A kid from Mayor Wright housing, you said, will pay \$200 to be on a team, not necessarily. . .

JS: To buy equipment.

WN: To buy equipment to be on the team. . .

JS: Yep.

WN: Not necessarily representing Pālama Settlement. Represent another team.

JS: Well, I know there's teams in Waialua, all those teams, where they're paying big money now to buy equipment. Well, we weren't like other teams, though. We were Pālama Settlement. See, other teams have always bought their things, but Pālama Settlement, we always bought the things for the kids. So, everybody want to know, "How you guys do that? How you guys get the---the kids are gettin' things free?" All of the teams paying that \$200 for equipment. Pālama [too] now. Before Pālama didn't have to do that. Now, they got to do same things as the other teams are doing.

WN: It's not unique anymore.

JS: It's not unique anymore. Just like any other Pop Warner team, you see. And I don't know what they're doing with the academic program, the Pākōlea [Program] is still going. I don't think they would ever stop the Pākōlea Program 'cause the year that we started that, I knew it was going to be a success because of the first two or three years, you know. But, I don't know what's happening with the groups down there now. As far, how they set up their programs, but I am sure that they are still using sports as a reward for their academics. So, I'm sure that's going on.

WN: Okay, thanks a lot.

JS: Okay. All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

Reflections of Pālama Settlement

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